RE: ZERO DETAILED SUMMARY ARC 3 INTERLUDES

This document is a translation-slash-extraordinarily detailed 'summary' of the final scenes of Re: Zero's arc 3, which start directly where the anime left off, with Subaru having defeated Betelgeuse and confessed his love to Emilia.

Some advisories are needed before going in.

First: I have a predisposition for personal preference and whimsy. Because of this, or otherwise for unspecified translation Reasons, the names and terminology in this document will differ at times from what was used in the anime or is used in the fandom at large. This will likely be jarring but I request that you put up with it.

Second: My japanese has a ways to go and I am taking free liberties to skim or summarise wherever I feel the urge. Proofreading is spotty or null. This document would best be considered something slipped to you in private by a friend, rather than a definitive and perfect translation—although I will be trying my best to convey the story as I read it.

!!THIRD!! These chapters reference events which the anime has cut !!THIRD!![1]
1. Before the White Whale fight, Subaru confesses that his heart stirs when he looks at Rem. Rem says that she would not mind being his second wife. Subaru concedes to her with a 'well that's if Emilia's someone okay with polygamy'.

and

2. After the White Whale fight, Rem feigns death in a ploy to elicit a love confession from Subaru. The ruse succeeds and by the rules of 'no backsies' Subaru is officially in a state of having confessed love to Rem.

This should be all the advance information needed for perusing this document.
For anyone interested in continuing to my translation-summaries of arc 4, they can be found here: https://mega.nz/#F!VNdzDYYK!nK9fNU3LeprlZSbRAnlsRg [2]
For anyone interested in contacting me, my email is ankaa.burner@gmail.com

Let's have everybody enjoy these chapters just one more time.

1 These scenes are available elsewhere on the internet in english, if you are interested in looking for them.
2 You may (or may not) find terminology shifts between this document and the early chapters of arc 4. Again it will probably be jarring and again I request you overlook it; this document was written before I had completed any revised version of early arc 4.

Intermission: Scene on a Dragon Carriage

The dragon carriage rattles along quietly as it continues down the highway.

Protected by its blessing, those inside the carriage feel barely any effect from the wind. Subaru leans back and leaves himself to the silence, recollecting on the fact that this is the first time he has ever ridden calmly on a carriage before.

The first time, when heading from Roswaal's mansion to the Royal Capital, was supposed to be emotionally the most at ease. But that one turned into something horrible halfway through thanks to Subaru's own screwup, and in the end there was no room to feel any ease at all. But there's a number of things he only managed to pull off because he had that experience, so he can't exactly call it a bad one.[3]

And all the ones from the second time on were heading from the Capital to Roswaal's. With the reason for those trips all being connected to the Witch Cult, there's really no way he could've felt relaxed and calm during any of them. Thus, this is Subaru's first experience riding a carriage without any sense of panic or haste.

Subaru: “Say... Petra, isn't this kinda close?”

Petra: “No? Is there some problem, Subaru?”

Looking up at Subaru, with her reddish-brown hair swaying, is Petra. She has been holding Subaru's hand ever since the carriage took off, sitting on his left, huddled up against him for snuggles. Subaru had first thought it was because she was scared what with all that had happened, but with how she's persistently been smiling brightly and holding his hand, it's almost as if...

Subaru: “Feel like a dad. My supposedly-absent paternal instincts, now, are bubbling up from within me...!”

Petra: “You were all with the lady until now, sneaky. Shouldn't it be okay. You said there's still time until we reach the city.”

Emilia: “Petra. What we were doing before was, erm, something a lot different. Look, me and Subaru were having a talk that we needed to have, which was sooo important. It wasn't that I was keeping him all to myself.”

Petra: “Hmmph. I'm never ever gonna lose to you, Miss.”

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3 Subaru's idea to throw Betelgeuse's gospel was to intentionally catch Betelgeuse in the barrier between the area affected by the Windbreaker blessing, and the area not affected. The plan worked excellently and Betelgeuse got half-crushed by the blessing, before his sleeve catches in the carriage's wheel and he becomes roadkill.

Says Emilia timidly, and says Petra back intimidatingly. Subaru can't quite get a grasp on the situation, but going off her statements and behaviour, it doesn't seem like Petra truly dislikes Emilia or anything. It's probably just a result of his playful relationship with Petra. But being that Emilia is not used to children, her concern is nothing to laugh about.

Subaru: “Don't take what she says too seriously, Emilia-tan. Things kids say, y'know? You gotta smile, grin, sourire back and ignore most of it.”

Emilia: “I couldn't be such a charlatan, just because I'm talking with someone young.”

Subaru: “Who says charlatan anymore?”

Emilia: “Mmpf, you're teasing me like that again.”

Emilia pouts, dissatisfied, and Subaru gives a light 'sorry sorry' while his face breaks into a smile. Petra tugs Subaru's sleeve disapprovingly, indicating that she also must get her attention.

Seated between two beautiful girls, Subaru has been blessed with an uncommon happening Subaru-wise. With one girl being in love confession standby mode, and the other one being worth having some expectations for in three years time—but really.

—Right now, Subaru and the others' carriage is headed from Liafus Highway to the Royal Capital.

This carriage, which is not the one which had been installed with the bomb, is being driven by one of the youths of Arlam Village's young men's brigade. Inside are Subaru and Emilia, and also the children.
At first the others around had given their quiet consideration by leaving Subaru and Emilia alone together, but then Petra happily shoved herself in and now here we are.

Complaining at children for intruding on together time was of course something Subaru would not —quite do, but that said Petra's incursion did have its benefits.
After all, he only just got done saying a bunch of embarrassing things to Emilia. He gave the on-confession-response-standby-mode Emilia that smooth “I'll wait”, but the flame of love is still blazing in his chest with combustive ferocity. Couple that with the achievement he felt about getting here, and all breaks are off.
Worst case, he'd end up pre-emptively demanding something more than a lap pillow.

Subaru: “Ah man, that really was pretty risky there. Acting *that* cool about things and then that, hell that'd be mortifying.”

Petra: “What would?”

Subaru: “Just talking about how you've saved me, Petra. Ah, that's right, you kept your promise not to leave Emilia-tan alone. You're amazing, amazing.”

Petra: “Ehehehee.”

Subaru gently pats Petra's hair as he gives his double thanks. If Petra and the other kids had let go of Emilia's hands, she might have pushed herself again and gotten hurt. That that hadn't happened, and that all of Subaru's toiling had given the results he wanted, was unmistakably thanks to everybody, including Petra's, help.
Seriously, blessed. Too blessed.

Subaru: “There's so many people I have to thank once this's calmed down...”

Crusch, Felis, Wilhelm from Crusch's faction. Loathe to admit it but Julius, and the members of Iron Fang from Anastasia's faction. Have to speak to barely-memorable Russell too, and make good on that promise to give him the cellphone.
Kinda inexcusable that that exchange would end in Russell being gypped, but considering the happiness Subaru had gained as a result, it was better he close his eyes to that and put it aside as something trivial. Sorry Russell.

Subaru: “There's a mountain of things I gotta think over, too...”

First, he absolutely has to look into what the fuck Roswaal was doing this whole time. And he'd probably need to discuss with Crusch and Anastasia as to how to divvy things up from the White While and SLOTH fights. Especially regarding the White Whale. If what Crusch said can be believed, Subaru was in position to claim some part of the achievement.
It wasn't that he was lusting for prestige, but if himself—being part of Emilia's faction—could get even some slight fame, that would surely help Emilia. You could consider it shameless, but Subaru wanted to try to be proactive here.
And then after sorting out the immediate situation, there's securing Arlam Village and getting things in order there. The future looks laden with difficulties. —And, before addressing any of that, there was still one mountain that Subaru had to scale.

Subaru: “Uhm, err, Emilia-tan... I have something, extremely important to tell you.”

Emilia: “Mmhm, whaaat is it?”

With her fingers in her silver hair as she leisurely turns to face Subaru properly, Emilia's amethyst eyes show a strong feeling of trust. Every time Subaru sees that light in her eyes, he keenly feels the success that his own actions have brought. Felt it, but just how would Emilia respond to what he was about to tell her? Just thinking it was honestly terrifying.

Subaru is going to tell Emilia about an unavoidable issue—That is, of course, about Rem.

If we're going back to the topic of who Subaru's giving his thanks to, there was unmistakably no other presence that saved Subaru as much as Rem.
Her deep love and devotion gently healed Subaru's broken heart, and beckoned back his will to stand again and challenge fate.

If she hadn't been there then, Subaru would not be standing here now. Without her presence, he surely never would've escaped from the hell called surrender.
When Subaru was most suffering, in pain, and hopeless, Rem was the one who always stood by his side and supported him.
Was it truly so strange that Subaru felt deep love for this girl?

Until now, Subaru had wholeheartedly believed that his feelings would only be devoted to one single person. And in truth, there was only one sweetheart in the world out there for Subaru, and that was Emilia.

However, without any change in his feelings towards Emilia, Rem's presence had evoked something of identical size inside Subaru's chest.
So, Subaru had decided. It might be tasteless, but being that he couldn't abandon his love for either of them,

—He would take both Rem and Emilia.

Rem had already permitted him to have such an unseemly idea. The remaining problem was persuading Emilia, and although Rem proposed that they convince her together,

Subaru: “If I rely on Rem even for that, I'm really crossing the limit for awful.”

Even if opportunity comes to bring Rem in so that she can contribute to the talk, Subaru's the one with the responsibility to first broach the topic. He was planning on getting love from two girls, so that was the minimum tier of hurdle he'd have to cross.

Subaru takes a breath, his heartbeat slamming in his chest, as he chooses his words. He looks at Emilia. She's staring at him. Mega cute.

Subaru: “This's something incredibly hard to say, but I want you to listen. Of course, I'm sure we'll have to report it to her sister at some point too, but... first, to Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “...Mhm?”

Emilia looks perplexed at Subaru's unneeded and stumbling preface. Anguishing over his own weakness for prolonging issue, Subaru frantically forces the wheels in his head to turn. In never-before-seen, full brainpower. Forcing his synapses to fire so hot they might spark, finding the absolute best answer—!

Subaru: “Honestly, it's about Rem. Rem kinda, told me she l... you, you can get what I'm saying, right? So, with that confession there, where this's going's I guess sorta selfish but...”

Subaru feels sweat rise on his brow as he frantically gets to cutting the ice. He's already entered some kind of excuse-scented direction on this, but he figures that Emilia, being not bad at suppositions, will understand what he's saying. Emilia raises her hands.

Emilia: “Hold on,”

Emilia: “Subaru, calm down. I'm starting to not understand what you're trying to say, but I can tell that you're trying soooo hard. You're a good boy, take it slowly.”

Subaru: “You're a good boy is a crazy depressing thing to hear! Or no, I really wasn't being a man. Yeah, let's just go straight for it. Alright so well, actually Rem told me she loves me, and once you love me too it's sorta... like, you'll both be mine, or something!?”

A momentum-propelled confession of two-timing.
Even Subaru has to recoil at what the fuck he actually just said. Emilia's reaction would surely be something similar, or maybe she'd look at Subaru with eyes hosting disappointment and scorn. Under those pessimistic abstractions, Subaru timidly looks at Emilia, and,

Emilia: “—”

Her reaction is nothing Subaru envisioned.
Her brows scrunch up as she silently puts her finger to her lip, in thought. Perhaps she's scrutinizing what Subaru just said, thinking up a suitable punishment for him—and, with an atmosphere that leaves no room for jokes,

Emilia: “Subaru.”

Subaru: “Yes.”

Hearing his name, Subaru looks Emilia straight-on.
Emilia, too, faces Subaru's resolved gaze straight-on. However, there's some confusion in her eyes, and with Subaru unable to comprehend what would make her react like that,

Her next words, which in the truest of meanings, transcend Subaru's comprehension, are—

“Who's Rem?”

SIDE STORY: NATSUKI REM

—Beneath a clear sky of blue, Subaru squints up at the downpour of daylight.

He hears someone crying.
A girl crying. Crying with all her might, using all the power in her little body.
Seeing her pour all her soul into showcasing her emotions, Subaru idly wonders how it is that kids have so much energy. And after thinking it, he's stunned at himself for how not-youthful it is to think such a thing.

Subaru: “I already knew that I'd gotten old, but noticing it being an unconscious instead of conscious thing sucks. And when I was trying be still full of youth and boundless energy.”

???: “The hell is youth and boundless energy. You ever take a damn objective look at yourself?”

Thus sounds some insults coming from Subaru's side. Subaru sighs at the familiar, crude voice and slowly turns his gaze towards its owner.
Subaru is seated on a chair, and a boy stands next to him at even eye level. The boy frowns at Subaru's silent stare.

Boy: “More important,”

Boy: “Do something about Spica's crying already! Seriously can't handle it.”

Subaru: “But I'm done for. Your heartless words have torn my tender soul to shreds. I've reverted to the mind of a child like Spica and I'm gonna start bawling. Forgive my done for self.”

Boy: “There's nothing forgiveable about a grown man doing that in public!”

The boy gesticulates vigorously as he retorts to Subaru's immature ways of sulking. The action causes the baby cradled in Subaru's arms—Spica, to inhale. The two guys give useless statements of “ah” and “ouh” and—there comes the emotional explosion.

Spica: “a——*hk*!”

Subaru: “Aaaaugh! She's crying! Spica's crying! Lookere Rigel, you better do something 'bout this, you're her brother!”

Rigel: “If you're gonna say that then isn't it *you're* the one who's gotta do something if you don't wanna be terrible!”

In a corner of a main street of a lively townscape, the two guys pass the responsibility around as they cradle the baby.
Passersby look over at the noisy three, wondering what's going on. But after seeing the two of them running about in circles, they look away like 'What, just the same as always', and ignore it.
So the two's pattern of running around continues undisturbed. Could call it charming, or just as easily call it riotous and unpleasant.

Subaru: “We've got a little girl bawling her whole soul out over here, and not a single person's giving us a hand... Shit, what's wrong with society?! Have people's souls become so barren?”

Rigel: “This isn't the time to winge about the world! If we don't stop Spica's crying, what'll she say when she gets back—”

???: “When who gets back?”

Rigel: “Well, who else—”

Rigel crosses his arms, nodding, and glances behind him. His face stiffens and he falls silent in stupefaction. His mouth gapes open in dumb shock. Following Rigel's gaze, Subaru also catches sight of this new character, and his eyebrows spring up.

Subaru: “Oh,”

Subaru: “Done shopping?”

???: “Yes, without problems. ...It seems you two've had some trouble.”

Subaru: “Nope, Spica's just super energetic. Once she's running circles like this, I'll raise her to be the type who runs circles around guys. She's gotta future as a bad girl, heart's pounding here!”

Spica's eyes open slightly as she notices the woman, and with her hands open, Spica reaches out for her. Her uncomfortable posture dictates her demand for swapsies, wounding Subaru's poor male heart.

Subaru: “That said, I ignore her desires and make her cry again then this's just winding up where we started. Oui, all yours.”

Woman: “She's all mine.”

Subaru's tone is pretty reckless, but his movements are horrifically gentle as he hands Spica over. A smile rises on the woman's face as she sees his fingers, his touch that of grasping something momentary and precious.
The woman accepts and firmly cradles Spica to her chest, gently rocking her.

Woman: “No, your father and brother are just no good. Once you hurry and grow larger, it's essential that you scold them as well.”

Subaru: “Hey now, don't implant things in her head while she's still too young to understand them.”

In Subaru's mind there arises the sight of, him having just done or said something stupid, being stuck between the two angry girls with their arms akimbo. And then considering the scene of getting told off together with Rigel,

Subaru: “What, that's not as bad as I thought. Actually that's such a happy vision that I might start crying maybe.”

Rigel: “No damn thanks. Getting ranted at by my little sister'd completely crush my dignity as a brother.”

Subaru: “There's no dignity out there that stays uncrushed after running around in circles with me. I see, I see it... loving your sister constantly spoiling her, your future is one of being whipped.”

Rigel: “Don't push this on me just 'cause you're whipped yourself! I'm never gonna be like that.”

Subaru twiddles his fingers in a mysterious fashion as Rigel refutes him. The one to scrunch their brows at Rigel's refutation isn't Subaru—but the blue-haired woman who had supposedly been watching over the two's back-and-forth happily. In a calm, but firm tone, the woman calls Rigel's name.

Woman: “Rigel.”

Woman: “Is that any way for you to have been speaking in public? It is not tolerable.”

Rigel: “Eurh, but I mean...”

Woman: “Your mother hates 'but I means'. And, your previous statement was incorrect.”

The woman gives the calmed Spica, cradled in her arms, a tender smile.

Woman: “Your mother does not have your father whipped. Because your mother, always puts your father in number one.”

A statement more embarrassing than bawling like a baby in public.
Rigel throws his arms up in surrender. Feeling something akin to a creeping itch, Subaru smiles.
The woman softly brushes her hair back as she blissfully watches over the family scene.

Rem's long hair, blue as the sky and caressed by the wind, sways in the breeze.

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They're in a corner of a city in Kararagi—a spot that you could maybe call a park. Subaru spaces out as he sits on one of the benches there.

He watches the blue-, short-, spiky-haired Rigel run about to and fro with his somewhat brattish friends. The way he talks with his dad is impermissible, but watching him playing like this makes him seem like something cute.

Subaru: “If only we could do something about those nasty serial killer eyes of his.”

Rem: “We mustn't. Those nasty eyes are who Rigel is. Even if he is enjoying himself, no matter how gleeful he is, his face means that strangers seeing him for the first time will think him nefarious and displeased. That is who Rigel is.”

Rigel: “I can hear you, and mom your backing me up actually really hurt!”

Screams Rigel, who has currently been caught by the oni and is in a state of being frozen, in this

Subaru-made-popular game called FREEZE ONI.[4] Subaru gives him a casual wave and so does Rem, hers small and careful so as not to disturb a sleeping Spica.

Rigel pouts with his sharp sanpaku gaze dissatisfied.[5] Looks excruciatingly like younger Subaru.

Subaru: “Which means it's already decided that his future'll end up like this. I'd shiver if I were him. ...Being told that I'd tun into me in 20 years.”

Rem: “Skilled at cooking and incredible at housework. Will acquire an ideal, wonderful wife who is respectful and devoted to her valiant husband. ...Would be what you meant?”

Subaru: “The hell is this normalfag kys. Oh, the normalfag was me!”

Subaru puts his hand to his head and pokes out his tongue. Rem gives a small laugh, putting her hand to her mouth as she hums.

Rem: “If you don't deny that and compliment me so lavishly, you do realise that I will get carried away?”

Subaru: “Where did I compliment you lavishly, in that exchange. All I did was purposefully not deny you praising yourself. Eh, that said it's unmistakable truth and there's nothing deniable about it.”

Actually if you let Subaru get away with unrestrainedly, unabashedly talking about Rem, things turn into something horrible with all the compliments flying around. Being that it's midday with kids scuffling in the park, lots of them have family members and neighbours around. If Subaru starts with the lovey-dovey talk even once, the entire thing will escalate and it'll inadvertently monopolise all the gossip around the neighbourhood tomorrow.

That doesn't sound so bad, was a tempting poison in Subaru's thoughts, but he consciously ignores it and lets himself submerge into peaceful harmony.
He closes his eyes while basking in sunlight, creating the illusion that he is floating upon the light's warmth. Something begins to drag his consciousness away, his exhaustion after consecutive late nights overpowering his attention. His head grows heavy, wavers. And,

Subaru: “Wha,”

Rem: “If you are tired, take my shoulder. As Spica is currently monopolising my arms.”

Subaru opens an eye to find Rem, who has scooched over to his side and is propping his body up. With their height difference, his head will fit perfectly in the crook of her shoulder if he leans over. Feeling some embarrassment, he looks down at Spica as she sleeps in Rem's arms—her father's black hair, and her mother's adorable face. A lovable, innocent life yet ignorant of the world.

Subaru: “Ohhh, that dang Spica. You might be my beloved daughter, but you're a bad girl for monopolising my sanctuary. You're sentenced to tickle torture later.”

Rem: “You will have to wait until nighttime to monopolise my breasts.”

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4 Variant of tag.
5 Sanpaku is when the whites of the eyes are visible beneath the iris at rest. Subaru also has it.

Subaru: “We're in a park in the middle of the day right now so could you watch it!?”

Hearing that incredible line prompts Subaru to twist all the way back. He glances over, to find that Rem is blushing beet red. How to put it,

Subaru: “My wife is mega cute.”

Rem: “Only because I am so loved.”

The two share a smile. Rem's being beaming, Subaru's being kind of ghnekk.
Getting embarrassed at their prolonged mutual gazing, Subaru scratches his cheek to pull himself together. “Then, I'll oblige” he says as he boldly rests his head on Rem's shoulder.

The feeling of her long hair tickling his cheeks in the wind is strangely pleasant. While sniffing the scent, Subaru rubs his cheek against Rem's shoulder.

Rem: “That tickles, darling.”

Subaru: “Ah, sorry. Did something and it felt good and my tension shot up. Now I'm following Spica's and'm all settled down. I'll leave the being unsettled up to Rigel. Ewww, Rigel's suuuch a kiiiiid!”

Rigel: “I can hear you, stupid dad! Stop bringing me up all the time!”

Rem: “Rigel. Your sister is sleeping, please be more considerate.”

Rigel: “This isn't goddamn right!”

Screams the frozen Rigel, but no one in the family's gonna back him up. Actually just straight-up nobody is going to help Rigel. He is firmly set in a position of being teased.
Subaru finds that Rigel's personality, speech and behaviour coincides a lot with his own, but Rigel's peers' neglect to shun him might be the only point where his luck outstrips Subaru's. That said, Subaru also felt that he was part of the community when he was a child. Rigel's future isn't looking so bright.

Subaru: “Gotta make sure Spica doesn't turn out like that. Rigel's unfortunate, but you take after Mom and have a bright future waiting. I'm just praying you don't get caught in the grips of a useless guy like me.”

Rem: “There is not anybody who could substitute for you. You are the only one of my darling in the world.”

Subaru gives a small smile, and the two fall into silence. With the tender wind tickling him, and Rem's body heat on his skin, this world of innocence could about swallow him.

Days of manual labour have built up some physical stress in Subaru. These occasional periods of family time are where he delights in the happiness of daily life. Basking in sunbeams, watching his son get teased by his friends, napping while cuddling up to his wife, while she cradles his daughter.

—Was this not sweet happiness?

Rem: “Subaru-kun—”

Subaru opens his eyes at the sudden address. He glances over to see Rem, her head tilted slightly towards him. Her pale blue eyes reflect Subaru, her lips trembling, suggesting that she has something to say.

Subaru: “That name...”

Rem goes silent.

Subaru: “Been a while. You've only been calling me 'darling' or 'your father' lately.”

Subaru closes an eye, his mouth relaxed, but Rem's tense. Her attitude makes Subaru think of several years ago, WHEN THEY HAD JUST RUN AWAY, where this kind of thing was incredibly common. She'd probably been trying not to let Subaru notice, but Subaru paid more attention to Rem than she thought.

Subaru closes his eyes, feeling the wind.
Rem was the one who proposed they all shopping today. Subaru has a bit of a guess as to why.

Subaru: “It's been 8 years since that day, now.”

Rem: “So you noticed...”

Subaru: “Well, that day's a huge turning point for me... no, for us. I noticed, remembered, didn't forget. —Would never forget.”

The day he knelt before fate. Abandoned everything, and ran away.
He had intended to give up on everything. But there was just one single thing he couldn't give up on that day.

Their decision that day, and her love—because that was there, Subaru was now here.

Rem: “Subaru-kun, do you...”

It's a nostalgic form of address, and one Rem had consciously phased out of using shortly after they fled to Kararagi. Partly to indicate their status as a couple to those around them, but likely also to make a change from the past.
Subaru had purposefully never referenced this fact until today, and Rem had never told him her reason for it either.
A whirlpool of complex emotion churns in Rem's eyes.

Rem: “...have any regrets?”

Subaru: “Regrets?”

Rem: “Yes. About running away. About giving up. About throwing so much away. About, me being what you...”

Subaru: “If you say 'Chose' I'll get super mad. I get to come home hand-in-hand with Rigel and Spica! Oh, nah don't really need Rigel. Just leave him behind.”

Subaru sees Rigel's face sour but shoots him the most feigned-ignorance 'I'm having an important discussion right now' expression to send him hurtling down into the abyss. Subaru turns back to Rem.

Subaru: “Y'know,”

Subaru: “This is seriously super late in saying, 8 years down the line and all, and I really have no idea how much effect this'll have after saying it tens or hundreds or thousands of times, but...”

Rem: “Yes.”

Subaru: “I love you more than anything in the world. You're my only wife, and I'm your only man. You're not the kinda cheap woman a guy like me could get by making compromises.”

He gets himself upright and bounces his finger off Rem's forehead. Rem looks surprised as Subaru brings his face closer to hers.

Subaru: “Just as I pledged that day, everything I am belongs to you. I devote myself to you, give myself to you, live only for you. —Though now, also for our children.”

Subaru brings his face closer and steals a kiss, nothing more than fleeting contact. Close enough to feel each other's breath, Subaru makes a mischievous face, the one that never changes no matter how much he ages.

Subaru: “So, that ease you?”

Rem: “...I'm sorry. I am always uneasy. Because I continuously fall more deeply in love with you, Subaru-kun. I believe that there could be nothing happier than this, and then it becomes that I experience even greater, further happiness. Happiness, and love, and so unease.”

Tears well up in Rem's eyes while she speaks of happiness, simultaneously shaking her head. She puts her forehead to Subaru's, each sharing the other's warmth.

Rem: “It feels as though one day, my darling who I touch like this, will disappear.”

Subaru: “Relax. I'm not leaving you, and I'm never gonna disappear. So long as your love for me hasn't exhausted, we'll never be separated.”

Rem: “Subaru-kun, my love for you would never be exhausted—”

Subaru: “Well then, together forever. I love you, Rem.”

Again, Subaru kisses Rem.
Teeth meet soft lips, her face frozen in surprise as Subaru plunges in deeper. Their tongues entwine, hot saliva on his tastebuds.
There is where he separates. Rem takes a little breath, her breathing now longer and heavier. Subaru

raises a finger.

Subaru: “And besides,”

Subaru: “Don't say stupid things about it being a compromise or whatever. What's a compromise? You mean we had Rigel and Spica out of sympathy, not love? Spica's a crystallization of our planned love, and Rigel's a kid born from the recklessness and flaring passions of the love in our youth.”

Rem: “...It certainly was a time when Rigel was born.”

Says Subaru with hand on hip in lecturing posture. Rem smiles, and counting the memories off on her fingers,

Rem: “We had moved to Kararagi and finally found jobs and a place to live, and what we needed to do was slowly, carefully prepare our foundations to live, and yet...”

Subaru: “No well look, I was young and impatient.”

Rem: “You were supposed to be exhausted after work, Subaru-kun, and yet bedtime certainly saw you lively.”

Subaru: “No well look, I was young and had stamina.”

Rem: “The time that we acquired formal employment and the time I became pregnant were almost simultaneous. How paled my face turned then.”

Subaru: “Sure are hard to accept, those follies of your youth.”

Rigel's face sours at getting treated like a mistake, but he appears to read the mood and manages to control himself. Pretty good son. Subaru gives him a nod, and Rem also turns her gaze to him.

Rem: “But,”

Rem: “Honestly, I was happy when I was pregnant with Rigel.”

Subaru: “And I was too. When I first found out, my nose leaked and I pissed myself a little, and after I got you to punch me to confirm I wasn't dreaming man it got bloody.”

This was probably the fault of her being inches from blowing the fuck up back then, but she punched him hard enough that when he slammed against the wall, the whole of their temporary residence slanted. If Subaru hadn't managed to brace himself, he feasibly could have died.
That one aside, Subaru remembers everything from when Rem told him she was pregnant, and all the warm feelings that surged through his chest back then.

But Rem shakes her head. Subaru tilts his head, not getting it. A slight shadow comes over Rem's smile.

Rem: “My happiness was surely different from your pure one, Subaru-kun. What made me happy... was my delight that I would never lose you.”

Subaru goes silent.

Rem: “Rigel is the bond between you and me in tangible form. The phrasing is not nice, but with a baby being born between us, it meant that we were bound together by something that would never be severed. ...That is why I was happy.”

Maybe this was what was making her so anxious back then. Being that they'd abandoned everything and fled to a new land together, with no one else to cling to, Rem was constantly withstanding the terror of perhaps losing Subaru.

Rem's self esteem is low enough to put up a good fight with Subaru's. For a Rem with hideously low estimations of herself, living with Subaru meant being constantly exhausted by the extremes of happiness and the extremes of terror. What stopped those extremes was the new life born between them.

Subaru: “You didn't believe?”

Rem: “No, I did. I believe in you more than anyone in the world, Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Not that. I don't mean not believing in me... You didn't believe in yourself?”

Rem's breath catches. Her conception of Subaru is inappropriately huge. Her own presence, in opposition to that, most likely felt minuscule.
—She must not have noticed that Subaru had always been harbouring the exact same concern. Even though Subaru had always believed that Rem was a girl far, far too good for himself.

It makes Subaru smile. Seeing that, Rem puffs out her cheeks.

Rem: “Fine. I was stupid. Of course you would laugh...”

Subaru: “No no. I just had that thought again. That you and me have the exact same character, but despite that my wife truly is the cutest in the world.”

Subaru's sneak attack makes Rem freeze in surprise momentarily, and she blushes. Seeing that reaction makes Subaru feel vividly that yes, I love her. He loved Rem more than anyone in the world. Was in love with her. He could scream it from the top of lungs. And in reality he occasionally did. They're a pretty famous, fiery couple in the neighbourhood.

Rem: “—Rigel, Spica.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Subaru tilts his head. Rem looks up at him.

Rem: “They are both the names of stars. The names of stars from the place where you lived.”

Subaru: “Yup. My dad was fundamentally a crazy, unfortunate man who treated social etiquette like wastepaper, but I think him naming me Subaru was a good decision. I really like it, my name.

Subaru's a star name too, see.”[6]

An assignment in primary school required that the students look into the origins of their names, which was how Subaru came to learn the history behind his own. Upon learning that he was named after a cluster of the stars that painted the night sky, he felt uncharacteristic glee.
Ever since, despite his tendency to drop hobbies quickly, perusal of manuals and indexes about stars alone remained a long, long-standing custom. He knew the names of most stars, and whenever he had the opportunity to name something, his selection would of course be,

Subaru: “A star name, basically. My online usernames were star names, and if I ever needed an alias or a fake name it'd probably be from a star. In some sense, aren't these sparklenames!?”

Rem: “I would not know in what sense you mean, but I think it's wonderful to take names from stars. When we have our third, let's do the same.”

Subaru: “Talking about a third right now's kinda pretty hasty. Like, Spica's still an infant.”

Rem: “I believe it would be fine to entrust her to Rigel once she's no longer breastfeeding. Why do you think I cautioned you that we could not have another child until Rigel was larger?”

Subaru: “It doesn't really stand out since I'm around, but you're pretty damn harsh on Rigel too, Rem!”

Subaru stands up, brushing off his ass.

Subaru: “Wanna put our shopping down, say it's bout time to go home. Outside we have the public gaze bothering us and we can't get as lovey dovey as we want.”

Rem: “Indeed. I am in the mood for full-strength full-power lovey dovey for the first time in a while.”

Subaru: “C-can my libido really keep up with an oni's stamina...?”

Subaru mutters to himself in terror, then goes and holds his hand out to Rem, still seated on the bench. Rem slowly takes his hand and pulls herself up, simultaneously pulling Subaru into her breasts. Subaru relishes the warmth of simultaneously hugging both Rem and Spica, then,

Subaru: “Right, off we go then. To our home.”

Rem: “Yes, darling.”

Subaru holds the shopping bag in one hand, Rem's hand in the other. With Subaru a half-step ahead of her, they walk close together as they hold hands.
They go over to their son, still frozen in the middle of the square,

Subaru: “Hey, my son enjoying the Sapporo Snow Festival. This game of Freeze Oni isn't going anywhere and watching it's the peak of boring, so me, mom, and your sister're going home. You go

6 Font change indicates Subaru's name has been written in Kanji rather than the usual katakana. Subaru's name means 'Pleiades,' that being the Seven Sisters from Greek mythology, with the additional Japanese meaning of 'to combine'.

stay at friend's overnight.”

Rigel: “Aren't you just plain goddamn throwing me out!? Or no actually, let's talk about how my parents were there in the middle of a park in broad daylight, kissing.”

Subaru: “That's what you get, Mister Envy. Too bad, Rigel. This Rem's for my use only.”

Rigel: “Shut up!!”

Rigel screams in anger, his sharp sanpaku gaze on Subaru who laughs loudly. But Rigel sees that Subaru seems to enjoy all this, and he gives a long, deep sigh. Rigel shakes his head.

Rigel: “Cool it, cool it, me. Don't get caught up in dad's pace. Cool it, cooool it. Right, cooled it. So, what were you talking about with mom?”

Subaru: “Hmm? Stuff like how your name's origin is a star name. Actually, the first candidate for your name was Vega, but...”

Rigel: “That's badass! Why didn't you!?”

Subaru: “Uh, because it's badass? Felt like you'd be hard to deal with in your rebellious age so we stopped on that one. I knew that age would pass eventually, but this father's heart of mine didn't wanna get bested by its son.”

Rigel: “That's how far you imagined the future of a just-born infant!?”

Rigel jumps up as he retorts to Subaru's blatant joking. And,

???: “Ahh, Rigel moved! Rigel broke the rules of Freeze Oni!”

Rigel: “Ah!”

The Oni strikes Rigel with a verbal attack at this critical juncture. Rigel's throat freezes. Subaru gives Rigel's shoulders a slap.

Subaru: “Guys who break the rules of Freeze Oni play a penalty game. Oni's gonna get tickled 'till he can't laugh or cry anymore. —Good luck.”

Rigel: “Don't say something so stupid with such a serious expr... hey, what, you guys! Sto—wait! Don't take this man's words seriously! Wa, wuahaaaaaaaaaaa—!”

Children appear one-after-another to chase Rigel around. Rigel flees. But, they capture him. They push him to the ground, his limbs restrained, and assault his body with their merciless fingers.

Subaru: “Farewell, my son. You were a good boy. Your father was the one at fault.”

Rem: “Rigel. Your mother and father have important things to discuss, so stay overnight at a friend's house for today. Also, you are forbidden to use your horn. So as not to tear your clothes.”

Rigel: “I, I'll remember this, you heartless parents—!!”

Spica sees her big bro getting TORTURED by LEAGUES of TICKLY HANDS and makes a happy-sounding noise. Looks like she's got a promising kind of personality to her. She'll probably become a bigger fixture in the Natsuki Household than Rigel.

With his somewhat twisted exhibition of love for his beloved son Rigel conveyed, Subaru takes Rem's hand and starts walking. Towards the tranquillity and happiness-filled abode in which his precious family lived.

Rem: “Subaru-kun.”

Subaru: “Hm?”

Rem tugs on his hand, prompting Subaru to stop walking. He glances back.
The moment he does, a strong wind blows past the two. Subaru unwittingly closes his eyes, slowly opening them again once the wind's noise subsides.

The wind caresses Rem's long, blue hair, which glimmers so much as if to melt into the sunlight. Rem, with her hair grown long. Subaru more or less knew in counter to whom she had done that. When Subaru now thought of long-haired girls, the first image to arise in his mind was that of the most precious woman in the world right here in front of him.

Cradling their beloved daughter, her long blue hair quietly tousled in wind, Rem smiles at Subaru. For Subaru, that was the smile of his most beloved which evoked feelings of dearness in him, paralleled by no other.

Rem:
“I, right now, am happier than any in the world.”

INTERMISSION: TIME TO EAT

—While leaning against the frame of the bumping carriage, Rem thinks only of him.

Getting the sudden feeling that someone has called her name, Rem she raises her downcast head. Then she faintly narrows her eyes in the wake of the beaming sunlight.
Before Rem's eyes are several carriages which lead their group through the highway, transporting the many wounded who had participated in the White Whale subjugation.

They are returning to the Capital in emergency conditions, with only the bare minimum of stop-gap first-aid. Their number of injured is more than few. But even with their faces twisted in pain, their smiles indicate a feeling of accomplishment and the realization of a long-held desire.
A desire they'd kept constantly for years. The truth of having achieved this aim bore no comparison to the non-fatal wounds sustained while finishing it.
For these people, their return to the capital was one of triumph. Rem sees them, and feeling an unbearable, itchy sensation, finds some hate for her own shallowness.

???: “You don't look so pleased, Rem. Worries unending, indeed.”

Rem: “...Crusch-sama.”

Rem looks aside to find Crusch, seated right next to her.
That Crusch's bearing gives no suggestion of the not-trifling wounds bandaged beneath her armour is something that Rem finds admirable, although not even Crusch can fully conceal her body's fatigue. That she is riding in the carriage is because her riding alone on a dragon would provoke unease, and so the decision was made that she would ride alongside Rem at least until they sighted the Capital.

Seeing Rem's concerned gaze, Crusch shrugs to show off her health. She gives a light jerk of her chin.

Crusch: “But consider,”

Crusch: “Wilhelm and Felis. The warriors of our battalion are elite. Ricardo's mercenaries are also assisting... and most vitally, I find it difficult to imagine that Anastasia Hoshin hasn't already considered matters that far. The enemy's combat strength provokes some unease, but I don't sense that they'll lose.”

Rem: “And with that being, my worrying is merely my egotism.”

Crusch: “Even with some roots of unease quashed, the concerns will never end. Should the anxiety be a result of your own doing, by contemplating yourself or by sobering the matter, the situation surely will change. Although, when the topic is a presence of foes, that becomes a complicated prospect. —Reassuring others is not my forte. Forgive me.”

Seeing Rem's expression get even unhappier, Crusch senses her own gaffe and lowers her gaze. In doing, Rem feels that Crusch suddenly dropped some of her aloof formality, and a smile etches itself across her face. Crusch catches sight of of this, and gives a satisfied nod.

Crusch: “Natsuki Subaru said the same. That smiling suits you better, Rem. It sounded as simple

flirtation when listening from aside, but it was surprisingly not a statement to jest of."

Rem: "Crusch-sama, you... give a different impression when you are smiling. You usually present yourself with such steel, but when you smile like this, it is almost as if..."

Crusch: "I am occasionally told as much, and it does cause me bother. Accordingly, it isn't frequently that I give unneeded smiles in public. My stature as a standoffish woman compounds evermore."

Rem's lost on whether that was a joke and if it's alright to laugh, but seeing Crusch's mouth relax makes Rem's face break into a smile as well.
The always-gallant and dignified Crusch was one of the ideal female figures for the constantly unconfident, timid Rem. That said, Rem's greatest ideal was of course her older sister, Ram.
Either way,

Crusch: "Ahead of them waits the Witch Cult. ...It's something I had anticipated once Emilia's lineage became known, but caution is essential against an uncharted opponent. Natsuki Subaru surely has too, but would Lord Mathers not have some countermeasure prepared?"

Rem: "I have not been so learned as to fathom the depths of my Master's mind. Even when I attempt to make him speak, you understand that he will not tell me?"

Crusch: "Severe. And we are now partners in alliance, so surely some looseness of the tongue would be acceptable."

That was probably Crusch being considerate for Rem, to keep her thoughts from going in a grim direction. Indeed thanks to her noting this, Rem can can spend the time travelling without getting stuck too deep in contemplation.
Crusch's words were tenable, and Roswaal unmistakably should have had some countermeasure planned. Subaru's actions would aid her Master in actualizing those countermeasures, and surely restore honour to Subaru's name.
No, his contributions to the White Whale subjugation already meant his honour would be restored and resound even louder than before.

—Hero, Natsuki Subaru.

That was a natural valuation of him for the Rem whose heart and future he had saved, and she unmistakably thought it an accurate valuation for the brilliant future he would surely, steadily establish from now on, as well.
If Rem could stand at the side of that brilliance, in a position where it sometimes turned back to look at her, then there would be nothing more Rem would desire. By that alone, she would be fulfilled.

Rem's heart always filled with complex feelings when she thought of Subaru.
Warmth, safety. But even so unease and some anguish, her chest pitter-pattering in worry.
The only one who could make her heart so ceaselessly swing from joy to sorrow was Subaru.

Smiling, Rem imagines Subaru's future, and a future with him.
Perhaps relaxed by seeing Rem's expression, Crusch touches the scabbard of her knightblade while wordlessly staring ahead at the road—thinking distantly about their travel to the Capital.

And,

Crusch: “—Hm?”

Rem: “——?”

Crusch's eyes narrow. Rem hears a faint noise and raises her head at almost exactly the same time.

The carriage ahead of them is where Crusche's eyes notice the something awry. Rem again hears the strange noise sound out from that carriage's direction. And, almost exactly simultaneous to these actions, comes the outcome.

—Straight there and present in Crusch's view, the preceding carriage CRUMBLES. What Rem heard was portents of that CRUMBLING, a rain-like staccato sounding out in succession.

A cloud of blood sprays forth, and the scene before the carriage turns into that of slaughter.
The dragon, the carriage, and the injured inside, without any restraint or mercy, are shredded into smithereens.

Crusch: “—*hk*! Hostiles!!”

With her breath catching for one moment in shock, Crusch calls the others to caution. All the nearby carriages, starting from Crusch, enter preparations for combat.
Although her body is still wounded and fatigued, Rem takes her flail and stands up—beyond the spray of blood, she sees someone.

She sees someone, standing right there in the middle of the road.
Unarmed. Undefended. Unwary. And their unrelenting, undiscriminating, unsystematic malice.

Crusch: “—Run them over!!”

Yells Crusch to the coachman as she climbs onto the driver's platform. The knight there cracks the reins rather than nodding his assent, the dragon roaring and speeding up—transforming the carriage into a plummeting cannonball ready to turn its prey into nothing more than globs of gore.
The carriage's aim stays true, locked directly on the person standing in the road. They show no signs of moving. They carriage would soon make contact, the crash shredding the person's slim body to—

Rem: “Crusch-sama!”

Screams Rem as she grabs Crusch's waist firm and leaps out of the carriage. Lacking the time to reach out for the driver, Rem bites her lip as she hits the ground.
And, immediately following—

???: “I swear, can't you just stop? I haven't done anything and you're going to run me over, could care less but I doubt that's anything a human being would do.”

Says the man in the road, his tone suggesting that he's having a lovely midday stroll through a local park. As if basking in sunlight, in ultimate levels of relaxitude.
If his collision with the carriage wasn't shredding the thing apart, then Rem wouldn't have shuddered so greatly at the abnormality of it all.

Just looking at him, he was an incredibly run-of-the-mill guy.
A slim frame, with neither long nor short nor particularly oddly-styled white hair. His black outfit was neither extravagant nor scruffy, and his face hosted no notable or eye-catching features. Just a completely ordinary, could blend in anywhere, spot-him-in-town-and-you'd-forget-him-ten-seconds-later, average-looking man.

But the ground dragon that crashes into him has half its body severed, and circumstances turn that the chips of the demolished carriage and chunks of the shredded knight blend into an indistinguishable mess.
And the most terrifying thing about this to Rem, having kept her eyes on him the entire time, was that she knew he had DONE NOTHING BUT STAND THERE.

Taking no particular action, that man had defeated a heavy-weight dragon carriage's charge by simply standing there, still and casual.

Crusch: “My thanks, Rem. You saved me. But... the situation hasn't changed for the better.”

Crusch stands up from inside Rem's embrace. She draws her knightblade from its sheath, her eyes narrowing painfully as she looks down at the indistinguishable, scattered pieces of the knight, who had acted exactly upon her orders.

Crusch: “Doubtful this will end with peace, when my subordinate has been slain so gruesomely. You, identify yourself.”

Her sword gleams with bloodlust as she thrusts it forward, Crusch's tone towards the man sharp. The man puts his hand to his chin and starts nodding, as if agreeing with himself.

Man: “I see, got it. So you don't know who I am. But that said, I know who you are. Since right now in the Royal Capital... no, all over the country, people're talking about you all. I mean, you're the candidates for the next Ruler. Even someone as distant from the workings of the world as I can at least imagine what a gigantic burden it must be.”

Crusch: “Silence the chatter—Answer me, and next I slay.”

Man: “Well isn't that an awful thing to say to someone. But, maybe you have to be that overbearing if you're going to shoulder a whole country. Personally I can't comprehend that acumen but, perhaps you shouldn't be able to understand the mentality of someone willingly pursuing a position as responsibility-laden as Ruler. Ah, but I'm not saying that since I can't comprehend it, I'm denying it. I don't have intention in the slightest to be that overbearing. Unlike you, I...”

He goes on talking and talking and talking, ignoring Crusch's demand.
But,

Crusch: “—I said, that was it.”

Crusch interrupts him, her voice cold, simultaneously swinging her windblade.
An invisible attack born from Crusch's combined wind magic and sword skill—Hundred-Man Slash, her famous long-range, super high-class slashing attack. The slash sweeps through the man's torso, this attack being one capable of killing with not even the one stuck knowing where it had

come from or who had fired it.

When the witchbeast the SIZEABLE HARE appeared in the Karsten Domain, this attack annihilated all the witchbeasts seemingly subordinate to the Hare. Given its name from its incredible achievement in its first campaign, this was Duchess Crusch Karsten's HUNDRED-MAN SLASH.

Able even to tear the White Whale's thick hide, its destructive power proved incredibly important for felling the beast. A man of a figure so small as to be imcomparable to that massive witchbeast plainly shouldn't withstand it.
But even so,

Man: “...Attacking someone who's in the middle of a pleasant chat, just what kind of upbringing did you get?”

His head tilted, making a show of lightly brushing off his stricken body, the man was still there. That man had not trembled in the slightest when faced with an attack strong enough to rip open the White Whale, and his body—no, not simply just his body—even his clothes lack any sign of damage from the sword.
How he managed to defend against the attack was yet another complete unknown.

Crusch's breath catches, Rem's body stiffens further at this aberrant being. The man gives a sigh, and sounding peeved, lowers his voice.

Man: “You know,”

Man: “I was talking. You know I was talking? If you're going to interfere with that then well, don't you find that just a little wrong? You don't think it's incorrect? A person's right to speak, isn't something I want to be advocating in the slightest but whatever, even so when someone is talking don't you think it's implicitly understood that you don't interrupt them? Whether or not you listen is completely up to you so I won't complain about that but, just what kind of decision is it to keep them from talking?”

He stomps the ground, his displeasure clear. He jabs his finger at Crusch and Rem, the two pressured into silence by the man's eeriness.

Man: “And now the silent treatment, isn't that another dodgy one? You are listening, yes? You did hear me, yes? I did ask you a question, yes? So then you answer, would be what comes next. But you're not. You don't want to. Well, up to you. That is most definitely at your, at both of your liberties. You're capable of seeing this as me just talking and being attacked, me just questioning and being ignored, from your perspectives. So that's just how you're using your freedoms. It's fine, do do that. But you know, if that's how you think then it otherwise means this, yeah?”

He bends forward and tilts his head at Crusch and Rem, his gaze piercing and voice low.

Man: “That you're disregarding one of my few personal assets—my rights?”

The instant the chill runs down Rem's spine, the man steps forth. He swings the arm loosely and casually hanging at his side from down to straight up, generating a faint wind.
Immediately following, everything in his arm's path—the earth, the atmosphere, the world, breaks.

Twirling, twirling, goes Crusch's severed left arm as it dances through space.
Still gripping the sword, a spray of blood from the arm splatters to the ground, Crusch collapsing to the earth, going into convulsions from the violent bleeding and pain.

Rem: “Crusch, sama—”

After a second of astonishment, Rem immediately jumps back and to the fallen Crusch's side. Rem squeezes out what little mana she has as she puts her hands to the open wound on Crusch's shoulder, putting all her power into healing her and stopping the bloodflow.
The wound from the arm's severance is so clear as to be fascinating, her flesh, bone, nerves, veins and arteries all perfectly sliced through. Rather than shiver, Rem feels an inopportune sense of admiration at the artistic sharpness of this attack.

Crusch: “Fel, is... au, aaeu, uo?”

Mutters Crusch in Rem's healing arms, her gaze unfocused. Crusch's remaining right arm grabs Rem's leg, the abnormally strong grip wrenching her femur. Proof, that Crusch still had the strength to live.

Rem still had no clue how he defended against the attack, or what the true nature of this blow even was. All Rem could do was, without missing any cue that the man was about to strike, take Crusch and retreat.
But it was strange, this situation. Why had no one but Rem and Crusch come forth to face this aberrant man? When their Master had sustained a fatal injury, why were none of the warriors who bested the White Whale—

???: “A*hh*, seriously... no matter how much we eat, it's not enou*gh!* This's why **we** can never stop living. Eating, feeding, chewing, biting, eating down, eating up, chewing up, chewing down, licking, lapping, sucking, inhaling, devouring—Guzzling! Gobbling! A*hh*—thanks for the meal!”[7]

The high-pitched voice of a boy, from behind Rem.
Feeling the same chill emanating from the man before her at her back, Rem's entire body stiffens as she looks behind her.
And there, standing in the middle of the stopped carriages, cackling with his back turned to Rem, is someone covered in blood.

He's a short boy, his dark brown hair stretching below his knees. He looks as short as Rem, and perhaps two or three years younger—just barely enough to be older than the children in the village by the mansion.
His slim body is clothed only in dirty rags, whatever slight skin showing through thoroughly slaked red with blood.

Not his own blood, of course, but the blood of fallen knights at his feet.
While Rem and Crusch had faced the foe before them, the knights had challenged the foe at their back. And as a result, they had been crushed so thoroughly that Rem hadn't even caught any indications of their battle.

Rem: “You people, are...”

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7 His (their?) pronouns consistently alternate between boku-tachi and ore-tachi.

Her voice shaking, Rem backs off—to reach a spot where she can see both foes at once. Drops of Crusch's blood dot the highway with crimson, the atmosphere freezing as if snickering at Rem's terror-driven retreat.

Hit with Rem's question, the man and the boy look at each other.
And sharing a nod as if prearranged, horrifically wicked smiles arising on both their faces, they introduce themselves.

Man: “Witch Cult Cardinal of Sin, Bishop of GREED, Regulus Corneas.”

Boy: “Witch Cult Cardinal of Sin, Bishop of GLUTTONY, Rai Baten-Kaitos.”

❖ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※ ※

Kaitos: “We felt signs our pet'd been done in, so over **we** come to look and, a*hh*—what a wonderful harvest we have he*re.* So great, how great, pretty great, sure's great, maybe great, surely great, isn't it great, definitely sure is great! Tenacity! Love! Hatred! Chivalry! So many joys and sorrows interspersed! Which's exactly why, which's exactly why, eating them is filling!”

Witch Cultists—and Cardinals at that.
With Rem frozen stock still at that piece of vocabulary, the excited boy—Rai Baten-Kaitos—stomps the ground as he speaks, his voice queer.
He spins around and around as if dancing, staring affectionately at the fallen knights as he gestures at them with his arms.

Kaitos: “Mm, it really is g*reat*, coming over in person to do the eating. **We** haven't really gotten a chance to meet anyone so full of grit like these guys lately. Our starvation feels sated for once in a*ges.*”

Regulus: “Now that's something about you that I just can't comprehend, Baten-Kaitos. Say whatever you want about starvation but it's not that you're truly hungering, and saying that you're 'sated' isn't something that belongs to you yourself, either. Now, just why is that your present self can't be satisfied, I wonder? Listening? You do realise that people can only possess what their two arms can hold, and have what their hands can contain? If you can understand that, surely you'll be capable of regulating your own selfish desires?”

Kaitos: “**We** don't need and we don't like lectures. **We**'re not gonna deny what you're saying or say it's incorrect, but we also don't care. A*hh*—Seriously, **we** we cooo*uld*n't care less about anything but satiating this hunger.”

Baten-Kaitos of GLUTTONY laughs insanely, Regulus of GREED gives a bored shrug.
Faced with two Cardinals of Sin being in the same place at the same time, Rem forces her near-stalling brain to think, searching for a way out of this deadlock.

In raw combat, to defeat these two is impossible.
Crusch's bleeding has stopped, but she is still in serious danger. It can't be judged whether the knights are dead or wounded, but either way they can't be counted as combat forces.
Rem herself had just exhausted her remaining mana on healing. If she went into her oni form then

that should give her something for battle, but—faced with these two, she saw no visions of victory.

On one hand, with absolutely no gaps visible in his offence or defence, was GREED. There were rumours he had destroyed an entire city on his own, and Rem didn't know his limits. And on the other hand, with no visible limit to his strangeness, was GLUTTONY. His combat history was unknown, but he was clearly a man of strength who had defeated a group of accomplished knights in under a minute. Rem saw no future of beating him, either.

Rem glances around the surroundings, to find no sign of the liger-driven carriages. Those would've been the returnees and wounded from the beastmen mercenaries—and the carriage with the White Whale's severed head.
They ideally had fled in the ruckus and were powering as fast as they could to the Royal Capital. The one to order that would've been the mercenary group's vice-chair, Hetaro. He was a possessor of both intelligence and common sense, so he might return with reinforcements if Rem bought him time.
Rem didn't believe she could resist these two long enough for that.

Rem: “The White Whale...”

Regulus: “Oh?”
Kaitos: “A*hh*?”

The two Cardinals simultaneously tilt their heads at Rem's muttering. Rem's breathing stops slightly as she begins conversation to buy time, speaking quickly to not lose their interest.

Rem: “The White Whale, is what you have pursued us to collect? As our group was to return to the Capital with the severed head.”

Kaitos: “The hea*d?* A*hh*, so that's what was stinking funny. Well **we** don't really need the head or anything, and not like there's any point taking the dead one back so it's fi*ne*. We can just make another one if **we** want... We*ll*, it'd take the same amount of time to raise it though.”

Baten-Kaitos clicks his neck and grins, showing his teeth.

Kaitos: “That asi*de,”*

Kaitos: “What we're more interested in than the White What's death is whoever it was who killed it. Maybe the thing wasn't perfect, but they still killed something built up over 400 years of making. **We**'re certainly anticipating a uniformly ripe, in-season bunch... a*hh*, this was more than we could've imagi*ned!*”

Nodding his head up and down, his overlong hair flying everywhere, the boy spits as he laughs. His somewhat long canines click together as he speaks,

Kaitos: “Love! Chivalry! Hatred! Tenacity! Accomplishment! The utter satisfaction of feeling that for so long, long, hoarded, piled, simmered and boiled, passing down **our** throat! Does a gourmet banquet greater than this truly exis*t!?* Maybe not, likely not, surely not, plainly not, not a chance, not any chance, not any chance it could be! Guzzling! Gobbling! Any and everything! Our heart, **our** stomach, trembles in delight and full*ness!*”

Nothing he's saying makes sense.
Baten-Kaitos keeps on laughing, unhinged. In the midst of the repelling noise, Rem wordlessly shifts her gaze to Regulus, who gives a shake of his hand.

Regulus: “Sorry, but you realise that I have nothing to do with that guy? Me being here was complete coincidence, so this wasn't the result of anything I actively did. But that's just natural, right? You ask if I crave after something like he does with his hunger? Well, I possess no vulgar wants like him. I'm not of his ilk, always tortured and starving from unquenchable hunger, right, I'm satisfied with my present self beyond any limitation.”

Regulus spreads his arms out, his expression sunny. He waves those same arms which in this exact same manner chopped off Crusch's arm in big circles, a movement emphasizing his own presence,

Regulus: “You see, I really hate fighting, myself. If I can have my nice and ordinary, peaceful, calm, everyday everydays, then that's enough for me, there's nothing more I wish for. Unchanging, uneventful, peaceful times and yourself, that's the absolute optimum. My hands are small and my power is none. I'm a weak existence where you have to wonder if protecting my personal capital, of me being who I am personally, is truly the limit to what my best effort amounts.”

Regulus balls his hands into fists. One movement of those hands had cut down a carriage, several lives, and single woman. What kind of incredible remarks were these.
Baten-Kaitos, still laughing insanely. Regulus, spouting out egotistic theories and soaked in self-satisfaction. Plainly put, both were aberrants. Yup, these guys were Witch Cult.

Anger boils up inside Rem.
She lays Crusch on the grass, her breathing deep and moribund, and forces her shaking legs to stand. She takes the flail in her hands, and squeezes her piddly mana reserves to summon floating pillars of ice around her.
Baten-Kaitos' and Regulus' expressions change.

Regulus: “Do you listen to what people are saying? I just told you that I don't want to do this. If you were listening and now you're doing that, then well, that's you ignoring my opinions. That's an infringement of my rights. That's a theft of the minuscule ego, of the personal capital, that I've allowed myself. —That's really not something my wantless self will allow.”

Rem: “Have you said your piece, cultists?”

Regulus looks daunted. Rem rattles the chain of her flail in threat.

Rem: “One day, there will appear a hero who will destroy you assuredly. They will make you learn just how much misfortune your egotism, that your self-satisfaction has brought. My beloved, only single hero.”

Kaitos: “H*uh*, a hero. Well then, we'll be looking forward to them too. You believe in them that much, and no question **we**'ll find them delici*ous.*”

Clapping his hands, Baten-Kaitos leans down and sticks out his tongue as he appraises Rem.
It wasn't the gaze of seeing an opponent, or of seeing a woman. The glint in his eye was unmistakably one of a ghoul licking its chops at the dinner table.

The fallen people behind Baten-Kaitos' back begin to fall dim.
Rem no longer knew of those people's existences, or what positions they held. Why were they collapsed there, who were they, how did they relate to her?

The White Whale's fog was a nightmarish phenomenon that erased the existence of those bathed in it. Then, accordingly, the Authority that GLUTTONY held might just be—

Rem: “Head Servant of Margrave Roswaal L. Mathers, Rem.”

Right after she announces her position and goes to introduce herself, Rem shakes her head.
Right now at this very moment, the name she truly wishes to introduce herself as is—

Rem: “My single and only dear one. —My Beloved Eventual Hero Natsuki Subaru's Companion, Rem.”

A white horn sprouts from Rem's forehead, collecting the abundant ambient mana and empowering her.
Strength surges through her body. Her arm holding the flail flexes, the ice pillars ring incessantly as they wait.
Rem opens her eyes, registering the world, feeling the atmosphere, drawing pictures only of him in her mind.

Rem: “Prepare yourselves, Cardinals of Sin. —My hero is coming to cast judgement upon you!”

Rem swings her flail up, shooting her ice pillars off as she bounds forward. Baten-Kaitos opens his fanged mouth wide.

Kaitos: “A*hh*, nice backbone. —We*ll*, time to ea*t!*”

Clash, and in that moment, Rem thinks.

I wish, when he learns that I am gone, for a ripple to rise in his heart.

—In her final second, merely that did Rem wish.

INTERMISSION: EACH GIVES PLEDGE

—Her expression was so tranquil as she laid on the bed, Subaru could think she was just sleeping.

Her eyelashes sure are long, was another idle thought of his. Her face usually remained intentionally emotionless, but while in the stressless state of sleep, it filled entirely with a softness fitting to her age. Thinking about it, Subaru had never had a chance to see her sleeping face even once.

She always woke up earlier than Subaru, and he never had a chance to go to bed later than her, either. The her Subaru knew was always resolute, keeping to her own ethic while hiding what was appropriate to her age. But even that stubborn attitude of hers was something Subaru had seen crumble before him, often.
Her surprised expression, embarrassed expression, her sulking expression, her tearful expression, and since they had reconciled, the smile she would show him—all of which he was supposed to see many more times from now on.

Subaru: “—Rem.”

Call her name and brush her pale cheek, but she doesn't react.
She wore not her familiar maid uniform, nor did her white coif decorate her pretty sky-blue hair. Her outfit while working, fighting—now, unnecessary.

???: “So you were here.”

As he passes time stagnantly in this still, silent room, a voice addresses Subaru.
Subaru slowly looks behind him to find a woman standing there, her long hair swaying. She wears a high-class—but not gaudy—navy-blue dress as she approaches Subaru, her movements abounding with grace.
But her voice betrays some confusion and hesitation, giving her an odd impression mismatched to her elegance. Subaru can't help but feel discomfort while interacting with her, either.

Woman: “Is she...”

Subaru: “There've been no changes. It's not that there's anything I can do, but I'm still here. I know how pathetic and girlish it is.”

Woman: “Not at all. I'm sure she would be delighted that you're here.”

The woman says timidly to console Subaru, his head drooped. But Subaru reacts severely.
He raises his head, irked by her statement, and unintentionally shoots her a glare. He hadn't intended for his gaze to be so sharp, but he couldn't restrain it from turning out that way. The woman puts her hand to her mouth.

Woman: “I'm sorry,”

Woman: “I said something unaccounted for. My statement hurt your feelings, I don't doubt.”

Subaru: “No, I'm who should apologize. It was just me lashing out... wasn't justified, that. Rem would seriously tell me off about this. Like, DO YOU NOT FIND YOURSELF TERRIBLE FOR SNAPPING

AT PEOPLE IN THIS WAY, SUBARU-KUN?”

Hitching his shoulders, Subaru pitches his voice up as he imitates Rem's speech.
He managed to copy her voice for that statement in the same manner that she spoke it in his mind.
That nobody except Subaru could possibly understand that was saddening.
There was not even anybody who could point out how terrible his impersonation was for him.

The woman lowers her gaze in pain at Subaru's too-vacant behaviour and hollow voice, silent as she supportingly holds her left arm with her right hand.
A shadow falls over both of them in this silent room. Seeped in that familiar sensation, Subaru's heart shakes its head. Most likely, he can't stay like this.
If he remained submerged in this dolorous sea, he could settle everything without experiencing the accompanying pain, thought Subaru. But that was not what Natsuki Subaru should do.
Not what the man Rem believed in and loved should do, ever.

Subaru: “Do you have some kind of business for me?”

Woman: “Yes. We would like everyone to meet together to talk. We are gathering in the lounge, so if it would suit you—um...”

The woman nods with some relief at Subaru broaching the topic, but her sentence jams halfway through, and her brows furrow in awkward embarrassment. Subaru notices it late.

Subaru: “I am Natsuki Subaru.”

Woman: “...I'm sorry. Natsuki Subaru-sama, it'd be then. I'll remember it well. I had heard my debts to you are large, and I apologize for my rudeness.”

Subaru: “That wasn't your fault. You presently must have far too much to remember, don't worry about it.”

The woman bows her head apologetically. Unease stabs through Subaru's chest with every graceful —feminine—action she takes. Not even Subaru was insensitive enough to voice it.

Shaking his head, Subaru discards both the woman's thanks and his unease as he stands up. As his final action, he turns back toward the girl laid on the bed, softly brushing away her bangs with his finger.

Subaru: “Well, see you later, Rem.”

Breathing faintly, her body assuredly existing right here.
—For a girl vanished from everyone's memory, this was all that remained of her self.

Turning his back to Rem, Subaru faces the woman and gestures at the door.

Subaru: “The lounge, right? Sorry for making you wait, off we go then.”

Woman: “Yes. So let us, Natsuki Subaru-sama.”

The woman tilts her head, smiling faintly. Her long, green hair flows alongside the movement with

hideous femininity.
Loathe to accept that, Subaru averts his gaze and conceals his thoughts beneath a false smile.

Subaru: “I apologize so much for making you fetch me—Crusch-san.”

Subaru says to Crusch, her now seemingly a completely different person.

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—Subaru had arrived at the Royal Capital after everything was already over.

He barely remembered anything of his conversation on the road with Emilia.
He was supposed to be filled with accomplishment with her sitting right at his side, but inside that speeding carriage, the only thing occupying Subaru's focus was the existence of another girl.

<—Who's Rem?>

That was what Emilia said, head tilted, curious and confused.
If Subaru had seen even a speck of an Emilia-flavoured joke in her statement or behaviour, he might've managed to go along with it and joke back.
But Subaru sighted not a single scrap of hope in her attitude, and Emilia didn't divulge to a stunned Subaru any intention of jesting, either.

Neither Petra, nor the other children nor anyone remembered Rem.
After confirming entirely that with the people in the carriage, Subaru frantically ordered the driver to speed to the Capital.

Something had to be wrong, he thought. This couldn't be happening, he believed.
He'd done everything perfectly. He'd grasped the optimum path. Everyone saved, goal realised, pain and suffering and sorrow overcome, and maybe he'd taken some permanent wounds but he'd done it.
But despite that—

Felis: “Ah, there's Subaru-kyun. Jyust like you, Crusch-sama. Finding fickle kitties is exactly your speciality.”

While they go down the hall to the lounge, somebody spots and calls out to them.
It's Felis, his short skirt flapping, liberated from his knight outfit and his cat ears swaying. He walks over to Subaru and Crusch with a spring in his step, quietly taking the stopped Crusch's hand,

Crusch: “Felis-sa—”

Felis: “Felis, is the one. You and Feli-chan have known each other for a long, lyooooong time, Crusch-sama, so I think honourifics this late're just so dyistancing and lonely. You meanie.”

Felis gives Crusch's shoulder a teasing poke with his unoccupied hand. Although clearly lost at his incredibly close attitude, Crusch fundamentally accepts it and bows her head.

Crusch: “I'm sorry.”

Crusch: “Like it was before—will not be easy to achieve, but I'll do my best, Felis-... Yes, Felis.”

Felis: “Nyo need to rush. Feli-chan is always on your side, and'll be at your side forever. And getting to be together with this meeker Crusch-sama feels a whole new discovery of your allure, so isn't this like happinyess?”

Felis cheerily swings their intertwined hands up and down. Subaru can't keep himself from feeling some annoyance at seeing it.
Subaru couldn't understand how Felis could treat Crush exactly the same as ever when she had changed so much. Subaru couldn't possibly suppose just what kind of conflict hid beneath Felis' smile, but even so the obvious lack of consideration made Subaru feel as he did.

Felis: “Subaru-kyun, go to the lounge. Emilia-sama and Old Will're both already there.”

Subaru: “...Right.”

Subaru's displeasure comes across in his voice, but Felis doesn't pay it mind. He urges Crusch forward as he pulls her by the hand along to the lounge.
Crusch's brows furrow in confusion at the strange atmosphere between Felis and Subaru, but ultimately she follows after Felis without saying anything.

Sighing, Subaru bites his lip and closes his eyes.
Irascible. His emotions while speaking with anyone right now were entirely volatile. He didn't want to console himself with any *well, that's inevitable*s.
He absolutely did not want to make his volatility her fault.

He follows after Crusch and Felis, entering the lounge behind them.
Feeling a bunch of gazes looking at him, Subaru gives the room a look over. Inside are Emilia and Wilhelm, and now Crusch, Felis, and himself. This was probably going to be everyone. Subaru closes the door behind him and without any urging naturally seats himself beside Emilia.

Emilia: “Subaru...”

Subaru: “I'm fine. I'm all calm now, Emilia-tan. —I am, fine.”

He answers to Emilia's concerned call with with a small smile. But he does not turn toward her, and is unable to look at her directly.
He has a feeling that, if interacts with Emilia right now, he'd plainly expose his unpleasant side. The prospect terrified him.

Felis: “Nyow, everyone important's here, looks like time to have our talk.”

Felis claps his hands to get everyone's attention as he breaks the ice.
With Crusch currently unable to take the role as lead, Felis has to be the one to inherit it. He glances over everybody seated, him alone stepping to the front with his hand raised.

Felis: “Seems nyo objection so right on head.. nyow, shall we verify the situation?”

He says, smiling, opening up the proceedings which everybody desired.

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—What happened to Rem and Crusch was incredibly simple: they had been attacked by two Cardinals of Sin simultaneously.

Half of the returning White Whale subjugation squad died in the attack. The beastmen mercenary squad had opted for an immediate retreat, and escaped trouble.

Felis: “According to the story, by the time the vice chairs had brought along a squad of knights from the Capital and returned to the Highway, both the Cardinals of Sin were gone. What was still there were the corpses of our knights, and...”

Crusch: “People in the same circumstances as me.”

Crusch bites her lip and furrows her brows. The anguish arising in her expression likely comes from her own fecklessness.
Since either way, she could only think of the event as something not personally relevant to herself. That being because,

Crusch: “My memory has been erased... it seems. Do you believe this was also the Cardinals' doing?”

Felis: “More than likely, yup. I've seen patients with the same symptoms as you before, Crusch-sama. The person's memories all suddenly erased, and Feli-chan's magic nyot working to fix it. The cause's byeen unknyown until nyow, but...”

Wilhelm: “The Cardinal of GLUTTONY—Witnessing that Authority, there's little doubt.”

Wilhelm gives a grave nod, a sharp gleam in his eyes as he stares at Crusch. She flinches at the severity of it.

Wilhelm: “My apologies,”

Wilhelm: “I bear no ill toward you, Crusch-sama. That I have frightened you is inexcusable. I yet have much to learn.”

Crusch: “No, I'm the one who should apologize, for being an inadequate master. I am endeavouring to remember you as well, Wilhelm-sama.”

A faint look of pain runs over “Wilhelm-sama's” expression. Probably from seeing the pathetic state of the master to whom he had devoted his sword, and from his feelings of responsibility and shame for not having protected her. It is only because he is harbouring a similar feeling that Subaru manages to grasp the old man's true emotion.
The one he doesn't understand here is Felis, who has shown no special reaction to the transformation in his master.
Felis perfectly ignores Subaru's inner thoughts as he goes on.

Felis: “So impossible to believe that just when we're dyone cleaning up the Cardinal of SLOTH, instantly here's GLUTTONY and GREED. Don't they knyow there's a limit for how hardworking you can be? We*eee*ell, it's unusual to see so many witch cultists getting so active at the same time, but nyo doubt it happened because of syome exceptional event, like Emilia-sama getting all famous.”

Emilia: “M-me?”

Emilia looks at Felis in surprise. He nods, swaying his body to and fro.

Felis: “I me*aa*an,”

Felis: “Would the Witch Cult ever possibly overlook half-elf Emilia-sama's presence? They're usually so quiet and hidden it's creepy, so if they're making a huge fuss of course it's gonnya be related to that.”

As he listens to Felis' explanation, Subaru crosses his arms and recollects on a previous conversation.
The night before the White Whale battle, Subaru had spoken with Felis and Crusch about the possibility of the Witch Cult showing up, to which they had responded affirmatively.
That they had reached that conclusion was likely because there were previous precedents for it.

Emilia: “Um... I, don't really know that much about the Witch Cult, but... the Witch means the Witch of ENVY, right?”

Then Emilia nervously raises her hand and fires off that amazing statement. Subaru doubts his own ears, and even Wilhelm and Felis' expressions stiffen. The only ones not surprised here are Emilia and equally out-of-the-loop Crusch.
Further intimidated by this reaction,

Emilia: “I'm sorry. I can tell from everyone's reactions that it's something that I need to know, but no one told me about it. I'm being honest.”

Subaru: “But, you have to know about the Witch of ENVY. I mean when we...”

met, Emilia introduced herself under the alias of Satella. And then Subaru pissed her off in the following loop by calling her that. So, she knew about the Witch of ENVY, and that her name was taboo.
But Emilia shakes her head.

Emilia: “In the village near the forest where I lived, um... people disliked me because I looked like the Witch of ENVY. So, I think I understand how the Witch of ENVY is treated. But, about the people in the Witch Cult, it's...”

Felis: “Nyow let's say here's where we drop the topic of just what kind of life Emilia-sama's had. But anyway... that she's like *this* sure is a dismal state of affairs.”

Shrugging and raising his hands, Felis sighs. The sarcastic attitude annoys Subaru, who clicks his tongue and glares at Felis.

Subaru: “How about you stop with that. Have you ever considered how brave you have to be to admit you don't know something? What's wrong about asking something essential?”

Felis: “Certainly is pyersuasive, when it's you that's saying it. Seriously, master and servant alike.”

Felis doesn't hide his sarcasm even at Subaru's irritation. This one seriously is liable to set Subaru off, but,

Crusch: “Felis. I cannot ignore how you're acting. Apologize.”

Crusch gets in before either Subaru or Felis, her weak expression completely overturned into something dignified and sharp, like her former self. Her gaze shoots through her knight.

Crusch: “Exactly as Natsuki Subaru-sama said, there is nothing laughable about someone asking about things they don't know. You have no qualifications to mock it. You understand.”

Felis: “...Yes, Crusch-sama.”

A softness comes at the end of her stern statement. Neither Subaru or Felis can hide their surprise at this fragment of the old Crusch showing through.

Felis: “Emilia-sama, I apologize for my impoliteness. Subaru-kyun, sorri-orries.”

Subaru: “You know, you... no, nevermind. Anyway, so let's discuss the Witch Cult. Emilia-tan's interested in hearing too, and honestly I don't know the details of them either.”

Felis: “Gyooot it.”

Felis puts his finger to his lips, and with the ends of his skirt flapping,

Felis: “First, just as Emilia-sama has stated, the Witch Cult is a group which worships the Witch of ENVY. They're purebred religious crazies who've been active since the Witch first showed up 400 years ago. They such a malevolent bunch that the Knights have regulations to slaughter them on sight.”

Emilia: “Slaughter them on sight... they're people, who could warrant that awful order?”

Felis: “They'll casually go antagonyize villages, towns, if it's for their goals. The village near the Margrave's myansion was in real danger this time too. You realise that a city in the Empire of Volakia in the south was destroyed by one of the Cardinals that shyowed up just now?”

Emilia blinks in disbelief. Although he agrees with her reaction, Subaru already knew the horror of the Witch Cult so well it had sunken into his flesh and bones.
You could probably use Betelgeux as a precedent to judge the abnormality of the rest of them. Although, from what he'd heard of GREED, he straight surpassed comparison to the combat force Subaru had used to fight Betelgeux.

Felis: “The conversation kinda derailed there but, the Witch Cult's six Cardinals titled as the deadly sins—they're what you'd call the leaders of the organization. Each of them bears the nyame of a deadly sin from the six witches who aren't the Witch of ENVY.”

Subaru: “Six witches... SLOTH, GREED, GLUTTONY, LUST, WRATH, and PRIDE, right?”

Felis: “Yes, there you go. The really famous ones are SLOTH and GREED. Like I said before, Greed's famous for decimating a city. Conversely, Sloth's known because whenever the Witch Cult kicks up a fuss it's usually him. But as for Sloth, the efforts of our subjugation squad have been a resounding success... is about where it is now. Right, Subaru-kyun?”

Subaru: “Yeah... Betelgeux of SLOTH is definitely dead. I watched all until he dispersed so there's no mistaking that.”

Nodding at Felis, Subaru thinks back on detested Betelgeux's last moment.
Loathing overflowing in a shriek of Subaru's name. He couldn't get it out of his head. A curse of enmity in that scream—perhaps that was what had spurred this present, cruel fate.

Felis: “There's five Cardinals of Sin left. Two are the piss-fuck culprits who attacked Crusch-sama and the others. The Witch Cult're elusive, and their methods for keeping themselves hidden when they're being inactive're completely unknyown. 400 years've gyone without any progress in eradicating them. Their goal is... to restore the Witch of ENVY, wyould be what people say.”

Subaru: “Restore the Witch!?”

Subaru's chair clatters at the force with which he stands up. This startles Emilia and Crusch, and while giving a big swing of his arm,

Subaru: “Restoring—is that seriously even possible? The Witch of ENVY's been dead 400 years, yeah? Bringing that back to life'd be...”

Wilhelm: “Subaru-dono, the Witch of ENVY is not dead. Its life even now is extant at the edge of the world. Albeit it being a rather irritating situation.”

Subaru eyes shoot open in surprise as he looks to Wilhelm. His face is grave as he narrows his eyes.

Wilhelm: “Near the Great Cascade is the shrine of the sealing stone. The Witch is presently sealed there, regrettably not completely destroyed. Not even the power of the Sage and the Dragon, and the Sword Saint, were capable of destroying its existence completely.”

Subaru: “Seal... no, actually I think I have heard this... but then it just turns into a question of why bother with restoration when they could just destroy the shrine? Why haven't they done that?”

If the Witch is sealed, breaking the seal should be enough. Subaru doesn't understand the Witch Cult's objective, going around slaughtering and destroying everything whenever a half-elf shows up.

Wilhelm: “Firstly, to approach the shrine is near impossible. The activity of mana around the Great Cascade is remarkably poor. Being in the midst of that, there is noone who can withstand the Witch's miasma at the shrine. Further, it is impossible to physically bypass the Sage's Watchtower.”

Subaru: “Sage?”

Wilhelm: “Sage Shaula. A hero alongside the first Sword Saint and Holy Dragon Volcanica who aided in sealing the Witch. Even now she remains secluded near the Great Cascade, inside Pleadies Watchtower. Although to say 'secluded' is entirely in name, the truth being that she keeps a watchful eye to ensure there is no one around plotting to restore the Witch.”

Subaru: “She sure has lived a while...”

This Sage's longevity kind of tugs at Subaru, but he decides to leave that aside for now. He glances back at Felis.

Subaru: “Alright, so yeah I get why the Witch can't be dragged outta there. But, if that's all then this doesn't feel too relevant to that stuff about restoring the Witch.”

Felis: “You can say that, but since Feli-chan isn't a Witch Cultist I really dyon't knyowww the truth of it. All I can do is interrogate or tyorture captures and hyope they spit up something useful, mhmm?”

Subaru feels dissatisfied at Felis' uninformative response but considering what he just said decides not to press him further.

Emilia: “So, that's what it is. Then that's why I... But, Puck never said anything about that.”

Subaru: “What's Puck saying now? I kinda have a mountain of things to talk about with him too.”

Emilia: "He isn't answering my calls. It feels like he's materialized, but all I can tell is that he's nearby...”

Subaru can't even tell her that it's alright. It's essential that Subaru talk with Puck.
Because Puck's statements could've had an influence on Subaru's inability to anticipate the arrival of the Cardinal of GLUTTONY.

Felis: “So, let's put the stuff abyout the Witch Cult as about dyone there. Nyow, with that over I'd say it's time we talk about what we're doing from hereon out.”

Subaru: “Hereon out?”

Felis claps his hands to grab attention and nods at Subaru, his expression awfully sunny.

Felis: “Hyonestly, so about our alliance... hyow abyout we cancel?”

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—The atmosphere in the lounge freezes as Subaru's insides conversely grow hotter.

He takes the sentence he just heard, scrutinizes it. His tongue wets his lips before he replies in quiet voice.

Subaru: “What did you just say? Dissolve the alliance? What're you plotting?”

Felis: “Only whyat I said. After all, barely feels like there's any benefit to us keeping the alliance gyoing.”

Felis expression is one of being rather impressed at Subaru's neglect to fly into a rage. Even this irritates Subaru, as sternly orders himself to keep calm. That said, he cannot keep his heart from seething.

Subaru: “Nevermind the mining rights or whatever, we agreed on this over helping with the White Whale subjugation, and we did do it. Grabbing just the good bits and saying bye-bye's a damn scandal no matter how you put it”

Felis: “The cons've gyotten too large, Subaru-kyun.”

Subaru: “Oh?”

Subaru inevitably gets belligerent, but Felis' demeanour isn't crumbling. He wags a finger.

Felis: “Right? With the Cardinals of GLUTTONY and GREED shyowing up as a precedent, it's highly likely that the Witch Cult are coming to bother your faction, which defeated SLOTH. And when this time's affair left Crusch-sama injured like this... do you think anyone'd want to stay invyolved with you?”

Subaru: “That's...”

Subaru's face twists as he glances at Crusch. He hesitates to outright deny Felis' statement, being that Subaru himself was shouldering the same injury. So the one who speaks in objection isn't Subaru, but,

Wilhelm: “I do not agree with that view, Felis.”

Felis narrows his eyes, smiling thinly.

Felis: “Ohhh?”

Felis: “Nyow, what cyould you be planning here? GLUTTONY injured Crusch-sama this much, and staying in alliance with Emilia-sama associates with the Witch Cult. The benefit of this is?”

Wilhelm: “It shall give us opportunity to avenge our Master, to... GLUTTONY.”

Felis: “And is that myore important than Crush-sama's life?”

Neither are backing down. Both hold feeling for their Master, giving their words weight.

Felis: “If we keep being invyolved with the Witch Cult, things like this will happen. When they do, the current Crusch-sama can't protect herself. Feli-chan'll heal byoth her wounds and her mind... but, if she dies you realise it's all over?”

Wilhelm: “However, we should not be capable of allowing the perpetrators behind this to flee from under our nose. Further, Crusch-sama's memories may return if we defeat the Cardinal. For us to

withdraw would indeed be imprudent.”

Felis: “They'll come back if we defeat who did it? What're you saying, Old Will. Oh, the memories'll return if we kill the person who ate them, sure you haven't been reading too many fairytales or drea—”

Wilhelm: “—Felix!!”

Wilhelm's sharp roar sweeps through the room, feeling truly as if a storm has raged through. Everyone flinches in surprise. Wilhelm's gaze remains sharp.

Wilhelm: “Felix. Never say those words before Subaru-dono again.”

Felis: “—I'm sorry.”

Having his real name called twice, even Felis casts his eyes down in gloom. The person Felis' gaze lands on is Subaru, who is again seated and now looking down, his hands grasped hard enough to draw blood and shaking minutely. White fingers quietly come down from above, covering his hands.

Subaru: “...Emilia-tan.”

Emilia: “I'm not going to say 'it's okay', as if I understand. I want to understand how you're feeling, Subaru... but I think it'd be nothing but unfair for me to say anything, when I forgot her and don't know anything about her.”

Emilia's amethyst eyes waver with sorrow. Seeing himself reflected in her gaze, and knowing that she was seeing that exact same feeble-looking Natsuki Subaru, makes Subaru get aggravated at himself. Feeling saved at her concern for that Subaru, he shakes his head.

Subaru: “I won't say that I'm okay, but I am okay for now. Don't worry about it, Felis. I... haven't thrown away even a fragment of hope.”

Felis: “You really are just so tyerrible at giving up, Subaru-kyun.”

It doesn't bother me, is Subaru's facade as Felis goes back to grinning and acting the way he was before.

Felis: “Feli-chan is nyot in favour of continuing the alliance. Feli-chan will definitely get Crusch-sama's memories back. So, it's fine to ignore getting revenge on GLUTTONY.”

Wilhelm: “What we should do, and what we will do... is still entirely determined by Crusch-sama's judgement. For us to brashly make decisions on our own makes for no good circumstance.”

This is the only point of common ground the two're gonna get. They both look to Crusch. She gives a firm nod.

Crusch: “Currently, I still don't understand anything. I cannot remember a single thing about my former self. I believe all of you must be uncertain as to how to approach me. ...But, first I give my thanks to all for giving me their esteem. If I am able, I wish to answer to your expectations. I will

endeavour to achieve that.”

Even without her memories, Crusch Karsten remains resolute. Just how far did a person's nature persist within their core? Seeing her like this despite the loss of her memories makes the question unavoidable.

Felis: “Either way, the one who cyould know the circumstances of Emilia-sama's faction properly, for a business-type conversation would... have to be Margrave Roswaal. First let's prepare a meeting place for us to talk with the Margrave too, and put this off for after that.”

Subaru: “Yeah, that's fine. So then, about what happened...”

Felis: “Don't you say a single word. —That alone's something to protect, separate from the alliance talk.”

Says Felis, his voice low and gaze sharp as he stares at Subaru. Subaru unwittingly swallows his breath, but has no reason to object to Felis' request and nods. It's a natural decision for Felis. If news about this leaked to the public, Crusch would definitely lose her position as the present front-runner in the Royal Selection. Which's why Anastasia's faction hasn't been brought in for this present talk.

Felis: “Nevermind Julius, Anastasia-sama would definitely utilize our circumstances. Gyood thing their group didn't see what Crusch-sama's cyondition was, hmm?”

Subaru: “...We'll need to talk with them when discussing our achievements, what're you gonna do then?”

Felis: “Feli-chan'll say that Crusch-sama isn't in acceptable physical cyondition, and manage something. All your group has to do, Subaru-kyun, is staaay quieeet. Understand?”

There's nothing more I request, or rather *there's no further entanglements with this I will forgive,* is Felis' stubborn attitude. Subaru can't do anything but nod. Ultimately, things end without any sight of further developments for the two uneasy factions.

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Subaru: “Thank you for just then, Wilhelm-san.”

The discussion over, Subaru calls out to Wilhelm just after leaving the room. Wilhelm stops and turns back to Subaru.

Wilhelm: “No,”

Wilhelm: “I am entirely shamed for my inability to aid you significantly, and my inexperience. Again in this affair I was unable to be of help.”

Subaru: “That is not true. We wouldn't have defeated the White Whale without you, Wilhelm-san, or have been able to leave Emilia-tan and the rest unattended without worries. I'm grateful.”

Subaru's speaking with complete sincerity, but Wilhelm's expression doesn't clear. His personality is an unfortunate one where his sense of duty means he winds up shouldering others' pain. Again, an extraordinarily kind person. Subaru gives him a smile.

Subaru: “I know things haven't settled down, but will you be going to visit your wife's grave? I won't say that it will relieve you, but at least since her enemy was slain...”

Wilhelm's expression collapses, complex emotions rising to the fore. Subaru's nothing but confused. Noticing Subaru being kind of lost, Wilhelm gives a big bow.

Wilhelm: “I must apologize to you, Subaru-dono.”

Subaru: “Wai—please stop. If this is about what just happened, then all I have for you is thanks, Wilhelm-san...”

Wilhelm: “No, that is not the case. I did not ally with your side while considering you, Subaru-dono. I proposed to continue the alliance due to shallow, self-centered emotions. My shamelessness in concealing this, I now find shameful.”

Not understanding what Wilhelm's saying, Subaru knits his brows. Wilhelm rights himself from the bow, takes off his jacket and rolls up his sleeve. Wrapped around his left arm, near the shoulder, is a bandage. Stained red with blood, the wound may still be open.

Subaru: “It looks painful. But, if you're wounded we could have Felis heal it quickly...”

Wilhelm: “This wound will not heal. This is a cut resulting from a slash adorned with the Blessing of the REAPER, which leaves unhealing wounds upon the opponent.”

Subaru: “It won't heal... but then, Wilhelm-san!”

If a wound's bleeding isn't stopped, then it's the same thing as having your life on a time limit. Subaru knows this. But different from the panicked Subaru, Wilhelm calmly shakes his head.

Wilhelm: “My life, as of now, is not the question.”

Subaru: “But that can't be correct. What do we do... that wound's...”

Wilhelm: “This is not a wound I sustained today or yesterday. I sustained it considerably prior, and now it has merely reopened. This is a rather large matter for me.”

Subaru's body begins trembling, teeth chattering, and realises that the cause of this is the gut-chilling bladelust overflowing from Wilhelm, whose voice is quiet.

Wilhelm: “The effects of the Blessing of the REAPER compound the closer the inflicter is to the inflicted. If you approach the one who administered the wound, it will reopen. That is what such wounds are.”

Subaru: “Then, somewhere nearby, the one who gave you that wound long ago is...”

Wilhelm: “The one who gave me this injury to my left arm, was the previous generation's Sword

Saint.”

Subaru's breath catches. Wilhelm's eyes flare with emotion cold enough to freeze.

Wilhelm: “Theresia Van Astrea. My wife's sword-cut has reopened. —In order to verify this, I must continue in following connections to the Witch Cult.”

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In a situation packed full of things he doesn't understand, Subaru winds up going back to Rem's sleeping room.

Ever since he got back to Crusch's mansion, whenever he had free time he'd wind up here at her side. Although he knew it wouldn't happen, he'd wonder whether she would wake up. Harbouring that hope, and his weakness.
Subaru didn't have the bravery or willpower to face Emilia in his current mood. Emilia also likely understood Subaru's hopelessness. Being at his side now would only hurt him, and she gave him his time alone unless he requested otherwise. Even though she was likely uneasy too.

Again he was imposing on people's care, attempting to pacify his weakness.
And although detesting that weakness, he fails to find any solution and thus he is here.

Subaru: “You told me I'm strong, but... if I'm not with you, it's like that tough-faking me isn't anywhere to be found, Rem.”

Rem's condition hasn't changed a single bit from before he went to the lounge.
She is breathing. Her heart is beating. But there are no other signs of life. She is there, but not. Now, she was nowhere except inside Subaru.
Yet,

Subaru: “—What a twist it is to see you here.”

???: “Is it really so strange for me to be here? I would've known her too. So, should be fine for me to wander in and take a look.”

Subaru: “How could you dare say that?”

While touching sleeping Rem's forehead, Subaru glares at the long-tailed grey cat.
That the spirit, who had hidden away during the talk in the lounge, had been here in this place inspired nothing but discomfort.

Puck: “Why are you glaring like that? Did I do something?”

Subaru: “...I'm sure you did nothing. Emilia-tan was looking for you, you really think it's fine to be hanging around in here?”

Puck: “If you're gonna ask if it's 'fine', then that's a bit tricky. It isn't as though Lia restricts my freedoms, but if you're asking if I wanted to upset her then no, I didn't.”

Mutters Puck jovially.

Puck: “But,”

Puck approaches Subaru's face.

Puck: “For now I thought it was best I speak with you, Subaru.”

Subaru: “...Watching you acting like you're seeing through everything's pissing me off.”

Subaru clicks his tongue and averts his gaze, but Puck just waits quietly. Subaru sighs, and although loathe to go along with Puck's plans,

Subaru: “You didn't teach Emilia about the Witch Cult. For what aim.”

Puck: “Aims have nothing in it. If it's something you can live without knowing then isn't it fine not to know it? I would've answered if she asked, but Lia never really did... If it's better not to be involved with them, then don't you think it's better not to be involved?”

Subaru: “Sure. What'd be best is somewhere where she's fine not knowing, with no reason for them to know about her, so they won't get involved with her. But Emilia's not like that now. She's left the forest, and she's in a national contest to become Ruler. So, it's inevitable she would run into them. —And you must've known that.”

Subaru speaks with his voice low and menacing. But Puck easily lets it wash off, just floatin'.

Puck: “I did predict the Witch Cult'd show up. But I'd say that whether or not I tell that to Lia's another story.”

Subaru: “But it could've let Emilia and those around her avoid danger! I don't know what you're thinking, but with what would've happened here when you just leave Emilia...!”

Puck: “I see. So you must've worked hard to save Lia. And this girl was a sacrifice for saving Lia. Well then, I'll have to thank her—”

That instant, Subaru's thoughts ignore everything and divert entirely into slamming out a fist. With not a shred of hesitation, he drives the fist at Puck with all the force he can muster. But Puck easily avoids Subaru's strike, his expression surprised.

Puck: “That was pretty shocking all of a sudden, what happened?”

Subaru: “Never touch Rem again. Not your hands, or mouth.”

A voice comes out of Subaru so silent it surprises himself. His emotions are overboiled, and he might end up doing something inadvertently. Puck stares at Subaru, eyes wide.

Puck: “Got it.”

Puck stretches.

Puck: “I apologize for the careless words, sorry. Said something I shouldn'tve. I dunno if this'll make up for it, but... We could talk about GLUTTONY for a minute.”

Subaru: “...What'll happen if I hear it?”

Puck: “I think if you know that this girl's someone whose NAME and MEMORIES've been eaten, then maybe you'll be more likely to get what you're after, Subaru.”

Subaru's face springs up. Puck nods at that reaction, his nose twitching as he looks up, searching his memory.

Puck: “Putting GLUTTONY's Authority in simple terms, it's the power to eat. Eating the person's NAME robs other people's memory of them, while eating the person's MEMORIES robs their own memory. If both are stolen, all that's left is an empty husk. Husks can't do anything, and nothing happens to them. That girl lines up just exactly.”

Subaru: “Name and, memories...”

Crusch had her memories eaten, Rem had both. These damages were a result of that Authority.

Subaru: “Will defeating the Cardinal of GLUTTONY bring them back?”

Puck: “Now, who knows. Puking back what they've eaten... is a pretty gross way to say it, but I wonder if it's possible. Would have to ask the eaters themselves on that one though.”

Subaru: “But, there's a chance. It's there. A chance to bring back Rem!”

Subaru glances back. Rem's still there, deep in sleep. Breathing. Her heart beating. Her body's alive. The demon had only consumed her name and spirit. So, there was hope.

Subaru: “I am obliterating the Cardinal of GLUTTONY.”

Puck: “I don't think that's a good word to be using.”

Subaru doesn't pay Puck's words mind. For Subaru now, his final stronghold is to cling to that hope.

—When Subaru returned to the Capital, heard about the attack on Rem's group, saw her condition, and learned that there wasn't a way to bring her back, Subaru unhesitatingly stabbed himself through the throat with a dagger.
He couldn't remember what he felt then. Having achieved everything in the optimum way, answered to everyone's expectations with all he had—and then losing it, made the deed nothing he felt any reluctance toward.

If he was going to lose Rem, if he was heading toward a future without her, then he'd undergo the suffering no matter how many times it'd take—that alone did he remember.

Stabbed his throat, and with the blood and the pain and the heat and loss, he felt the sensation of himself departing. When it cleared, what Subaru saw before him was a bed where Rem lay.

The respawn point had updated. The point to redo had changed. Subaru had been thrust into hell. Thinking something must be wrong, Subaru went to commit suicide once more, but hesitated. It wasn't that he was afraid of pain or death. It was simply that he had realised it.

Even if he hypothetically went back to the previous respawn point, Subaru couldn't save Rem.
If he went back to the point before the fight with Betelgeux and after the fight with the White Whale, then he would've already had time pass since he had split up with Rem.
Even if he tried to catch up to her group, he wouldn't make it in time. And most importantly, retreating to save Rem would mean throwing away Emilia. And even if he had returned and explained situation well, was there truly a strategy to beat the two Cardinals?
Subaru and Julius were essential for beating Betelgeux. Emilia couldn't escape from the mansion to the highway unscathed without Wilhelm.

If he was going to save Rem, then Emilia—if he was going to save Emilia, then Rem—if he didn't make the respective sacrifice, he wouldn't save either.
Because he realised what a cruel selection it was, the hand going to foster Subaru's suicide stopped before the dagger pierced his throat.

Different from the White Whale's FOG, Rem's body was right there, but nobody remembered her.
And there was Subaru, at her side, dumbstruck and unable to do anything.

That pathetic, hopeless life would end here. He would end it here.
Taking Rem's hand, Subaru resolves himself. This time, definitely, he resolves himself.

—I, no matter what, am going to,

Subaru: “—Bring you back, Rem. No matter what, I'll bring you back.”

Subaru had told her. That he'd show her, show her the man she loved, become an ultimate hero.
So, would he not still be midway through his course?

Subaru: “I'm, no matter what... Your hero will, no matter what, come to get you. —Be waiting for me.”

He raises his head. Bares his teeth. Pronounces war on the enemy.
He'd make them regret touching what shouldn't be touched, encroaching on what shouldn't be encroached.
And it'd be no man other than Natsuki Subaru.

Subaru: “No matter what. —No matter what!!”

He couldn't bear his memories of his days starting from zero being ones without her.

No matter what, bring her back.